

Boston Conservatory Women's Chorus, Boston City Singers "The Bard Sings"

by William Roseliep

Sully Hall, Boston Conservatory



Like many cities, Boston has a diversity problem in its classical scene. There are too few people of color in orchestras, especially considering Boston is a [majority-minority city](#). The problem isn't just racial or ethnic underrepresentation, but social, economic, and geographic divisions, too. So it was a little shocking to see that problem addressed, at least in part, at a show I went to at the Boston Conservatory.

This Boston Conservatory Women's Chorus emanated pure power, and you would've gotten your wig blown back sitting in the first few rows. The concert's premise was the intersection of Shakespeare's written word with music written *about* the Bard himself. So we heard James MacMillan's *Sonnet*, Amy Beach's *Three Shakespeare Choruses*, as well as Brahms's *Vier Gesänge* with harp and double-barrel French horns.

But the swerve came when the BCWC exited mid-set. Co-conductor Daniel Mahoney told the crowd that groups like his needed to get out of their “ivory towers” and work outside the conservatory walls. Mahoney said BCWC had much to learn from up-and-coming outfits.



With that he yielded the stage to the Boston City Singers.

The Boston City Singers were young and fearless, and their mission statement—“training and inspiring the musician...to support personal development, celebrate diversity, and foster good will”—reads like a blueprint for Boston’s future arts scene. They did a traditional Maori song, and “Gloria” from György Orbán’s *Mass No. 6*. They even did show tunes. It was bizarre and glorious.

Boston is a city of tradition. There is a deep vein of historical religiousness that carries through to the present. We’ve still got “blue laws” on the books to ensure Bostonians’ moral compasses point true North.

But there’s an equal measure of revolutionary spirit here. Phony or not, we’re all a little taken with the original rebels, those 18th-century punks that talked a good game about liberty and freedom.

For a minute I saw both sides at once. I’ve never been to a show where the conductor questioned his group’s own mission. It was scripted, of course, but there was thunderous applause for the Boston City Singers, the BCWC, and the change they foretold. Music

schools are churning out exceptional performers, but it doesn't mean much if the music can't escape those hallowed halls. Tonight it did. And some new ideas snuck back in, too.